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## TABLET FEEDER

## TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to a tablet feeder  
5 and in particular to a tablet feeder featuring a  
partitioning member that restrains tablets discharged from  
a pocket portion of a tablet array member.

## BACKGROUND ART

10 [0002] Prior art document information relating to the  
tablet feeder of the present invention is as follows.

[0003] Patent document 1:

Japanese patent Laid-open publication H2-205523

Patent document 2:

15 Japanese patent Laid-open publication H9-39910

[0004] In the tablet feeder described in the patent  
document 1, the tablet feeder is so arranged that a tablet  
accommodating section in which a plurality of tablets are  
accommodated is mounted on a motor base in which a motor is  
20 housed, and that a tablet array member disposed in the  
tablet accommodating section is rotated by the motor so  
that the tablet can be discharged outside. Concretely, on  
the outer periphery of the tablet array member accommodated  
in the tablet accommodating section, a plurality of pockets  
25 are defined so as to be recessed along the direction of the

ATTACHMENT "B"

rotational axis at specified intervals, so that the tablets in the tablet accommodating section are fed one after another to the pockets. In the pockets, the tablets vertically arrayed are partitioned by a partitioning member as the tablet array member rotates. Thus, it is enabled to discharge out only the lower side one of the tablets retained in the pocket through a tablet discharge hole.

[0005] However, in the above tablet feeder, the partitioning member is made of a metal thin plate, and disposed at a portion of the outer periphery of the tablet array member. For this reason, although there occur no problem if the tablets in the pockets are arrayed properly, yet there are some cases where the tablets, if they have been caught halfway, are not partitioned well by the partitioning member. That is, because the partitioning member will go beyond the caught tablet, the tablet may be sandwiched between the partitioning member and the tablet array member so that the tablet may be damaged or chipped, or in some cases, that the partitioning member may be deformed. This would cause a problem that the tablets could not be discharged properly through the tablet discharge hole.

[0006] In order to dissolve the problems, in the patent document 2 above, each partition portion of the partitioning member is formed into a shape of brush. Once

the brush constituting the partitioning member is bent due to contact with the tablet, the brush is elastically returned to the original state, enabling to smoothly partition the tablets into upper and lower tablet. Thus, the tablet never be damaged, chipped or cracked and the partitioning member itself does not lead to damage even if the tablet have been caught halfway of the pocket.

[0007] However, in the tablet feeder described in the patent document 2, there is a disadvantage that since the partitioning member is made of resin, the partition portions having a shape of brush become deformed and, if worst comes to worst, lead to damage while repeating the elastic deformation due to contact with the tablets. In this case, there is a problem that a large gap is formed between the brush elements constituting the brush so that a plurality of tablets drops through the gap, degrading accuracy of discharging (feeding) tablets.

#### DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

#### PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED BY THE INVENTION

[0008] The present invention has been developed to substantially eliminate the above-described disadvantages. It is an object of the present invention to provide a tablet feeder enabling to surely prevent deformation of the brush constituting the partitioning member.

## MEANS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS

[0009] In order to achieve the aforementioned object, a tablet feeder of the present invention comprising:

5 a tablet accommodating section capable of accommodating a multiplicity of tablets;

a tablet array member which is disposed in the tablet accommodating section and which, while being driven and rotated, retains the tablets one after another in  
10 pockets defined on an outer periphery thereof and discharges them at a discharge position; and

a partitioning member whose partitioning portion having a shape of brush partitions the pocket so that the upper tablets do not fall into the lower pocket, thereby  
15 the tablets retained in the pocket of the tablet array member are discharged by a predetermined number, the tablet feeder being characterized in that;

at least part of brush element among the brush elements constituting the partitioning portion of the  
20 partitioning member has a tip bent in a U-shape.

[0010] Preferably, the brush elements constituting the partitioning portion may be tilted toward a downstream side of rotational direction of the tablet array member.

[0011] Preferably, the brush elements constituting the  
25 partitioning portion may have their cross section formed

into a generally oval shape, and its minor axis may be directed along the rotational direction of the tablet array member.

[0012] Preferably, the brush elements constituting the partitioning portion may comprise a plurality of filaments which is got together and has a tip bent in a U-shape.

#### EFFECT OF THE INVENTION

[0013] In the tablet feeder of the present invention, as the partitioning portion is formed in a shape of brush, the partitioning portion, after once bent under contact with the tablets, can partition the tablets into a predetermined number of tablets without any difficulty. Accordingly, there is no possibility that the tablets may be damaged, chipped, or cracked. Also, as at least part of brush element among the brush elements constituting the partitioning portion of the partitioning member which restrains tablets so as to be discharged by a predetermined number has a tip bent in a U-shape, it is possible to increase an elastic restoring force when the brush element is deflected due to contact with the tablet and released from the pressure. Therefore, it is prevented that the brush is plastic deformed into a partly deformed state as it is used.

[0014] In addition, as the brush constituting the

partitioning member are tilted toward the downstream of the rotational direction of the tablet array member, or the brush is formed into a generally oval shape with its minor axis directed along the rotational direction of the tablet array member, the brush will make contact with the tablets and be elastically deformed smoothly in a certain direction, so that the tablets can be separated more appropriately.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 [0015] FIG. 1 is a sectional view of a tablet feeder according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an enlarged partial bottom view of tablet accommodating section of FIG. 1;

15 FIGS. 3A, 3B are perspective views of the partitioning member to be used in the tablet feeder and FIG. 3C is a sectional view of FIG. 3A along C-C line;

FIG. 4 is a plane view showing a state in which the tablets located in a pocket of the tablet array member are partitioned by the partitioning member;

20 FIG. 5 is a front view showing a tablet feeder of another arrangement;

FIG. 6 is a front view showing a tablet feeder of still another arrangement;

25 FIG. 7 is a perspective view showing a constitution of another partitioning member;

FIG. 8 is a perspective view showing a constitution of still another partitioning member; and

FIG. 9A is a perspective view showing a constitution of still another partitioning member and FIG. 9B is an enlarged perspective view of its substantial part.

#### EXPLANATION OF NUMERALS

|        |          |                              |
|--------|----------|------------------------------|
| [0016] | 4        | tablet accommodating section |
|        | 6        | tablet discharge hole        |
| 10     | 8        | tablet array member          |
|        | 11       | pocket                       |
|        | 13       | partitioning member          |
|        | 14       | partitioning portion         |
|        | 15a, 15b | brush element                |
| 15     | 16       | fixing portion               |
|        | A        | tablet                       |

#### BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0017] Embodiments of the present invention will be described hereinafter.

[0018] FIG. 1 shows a tablet feeder according to an embodiment of the present invention. This tablet feeder generally comprises a motor base 1 and a tablet accommodating section 4 provided above the motor base 1. In the motor base 1, a motor 2 is contained and a discharge

path 3 for discharging tablets A out is provided on back side. The tablet accommodating section 4 has a bottom surface formed into a generally conical shape with the cross sectional area gradually decreasing downward, and a cylindrical boss 5 is provided in the center of the bottom surface so as to protrude upward. In proximity to the outer periphery of the boss 5, a tablet discharge hole 6 is bored so as to communicate with the discharge path 3. This tablet discharge hole 6 has at least such a size that one of the tablets A accommodated in pockets 11 of the tablet array member 8 as described below are allowed to drop. Also, the accommodating section 4 has slits 7 formed by the upper inner edge of the tablet discharge hole 6 being cut out circumferentially, as shown in FIG. 2.

[0019] In the center of the bottom surface of the tablet accommodating section 4, a tablet array member 8 is disposed rotatably about the boss 5. The tablet array member 8 has a circular shape, its lower surface being formed into a generally conical shape that corresponds to the shape of the bottom surface of the tablet accommodating section 4 and its upper surface being swollen also into a conical shape. In the center of the lower surface of the tablet array member 8, a swivel 9 which fits to the boss 5 is protrudingly provided. A gear 10 attached at the lower end of the swivel 9 is engaged with an unshown gear



provided to a rotating shaft 2a of the motor 2, by which rotating force of the motor 2 is transferred to the tablet array member 8. On the lower surface of the tablet array member 8, a plurality of pockets 11 are formed at equal angles to the circumferential direction, each pocket 11 having such a size that two pieces of tablets A arrayed longitudinally one by one can be accommodated therein. Between adjacent pockets 11, a thin-width recess 12 is defined circumferentially on a site corresponding to an intermediate position of the tablets A accommodated in each pocket 11.

[0020] On the bottom outer surface of the tablet accommodating section 4, a partitioning member 13 is fixed. This partitioning member 13 is made of a synthetic resin material such as polyacetal, and comprises a partitioning portion 14 and a fixing portion 16 as shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B. The partitioning portion 14 has generally a shape of brush and is tilted toward the downstream in the rotational direction of the tablet array member 8. Among a plurality of brush elements 15a, 15b having elasticity and constituting the brush of the partitioning portion 14, most of the brush elements 15a positioned at the middle of the partitioning portion 14 have a linear shape with a tip bent in a U-shape. The brush elements 15b positioned at both ends of the partitioning portion 14 has a linear shape

extending like a straight line. In a state that the partitioning member 13 is attached to the tablet accommodating portion 14, the partitioning portion 14 is projecting into the tablet accommodating section 4 via the slits 7 defined in the bottom surface of the tablet accommodating section 4 so that the tablets A, A retained in the pocket 11 of the tablet array member 8 are divided into the lower most one tablet A and the upper tablets A. Each of the brush elements 15a, 15b has a cross section formed into a generally oval shape as shown in FIG. 3C, and are arrayed along its minor axis at a predetermined interval. Thus, with the partitioning member 13 mounted to the tablet accommodating section 4, each of the brush elements 15a, 15b will easily be elastically deformed only along the direction of the minor axis, i.e., toward the downstream of the rotational direction of the tablet array member 8. The tips of the brush elements 15a, 15b are arranged in a circular arc shape along the outer cylindrical surface of the tablet array member 8.

[0021] The tablet feeder with the constitution described above is used to take out the tablets A accommodated in the tablet accommodating section 4 one by one (one in this embodiment, but 2 or more possible). More specifically, the tablets A accommodated in the tablet accommodating section 4 are retained in each of the pockets 11 of the

tablet array member 8 in such a state that two tablets A are arrayed and directed downward. In this state, with the tablet array member 8 rotated, the partitioning portion 14 of the partitioning member 13 enters between the two tablets A, A of each pocket 11 along with the rotation. The partitioning portion 14 is composed of a plurality of brush elements 15a, 15b projecting obliquely, and each of the brush elements 15a, 15b is projecting obliquely toward the downstream of the rotational direction of the tablet array member 8. Therefore, the brush element 15b located most upstream of the rotational direction of the tablet array member 8 first makes contact with a tablet A. The brush elements 15a, 15b, which are all projecting in the same direction, are gradually bent under press contact with the tablet A as the tablet array member 8 rotates, thus being elastically deformed smoothly, as shown in FIG. 4. In this way, the number of brush elements 15a, 15b which are elastically deformed is increased so that the pressing force to the tablets A increases gradually. Thus, the tablets A within the pockets 11 are divided into lower one tablet and upper tablets A without any difficulty, restraining the upper tablet A from falling into the lower pocket 11. Accordingly, there will never occur flaws or cracks to the tablets A. Also, even if a tablet A has caught halfway of the pocket 11 such that the partitioning

portion 14 of the partitioning member 13 passes the intermediate portion of the tablet A, the brush elements 15a, 15b will be elastically deformed so that flaws or cracks will never occur to the tablet A, and that the  
5 partitioning member 13 will never lead to breakage.

[0022] Also, in the present embodiment, the brush element 15a constituting the intermediate brush of the partitioning portion 14 has a tip formed in a U-shape, it is possible to increase an elastic restoring force when the  
10 brush element is deflected due to contact with the tablet and released from the pressure. Therefore, it is prevented that the brush is plastic deformed into a partly deformed state as it is used.

[0023] The tablet feeder of the present invention is not  
15 limited to the constitution of the above embodiment but may be changed in various ways.

[0024] For example, the above embodiment has been described on a case in which the partitioning member 13 according to the present invention is applied to a tablet  
20 feeder having pockets 11 defined in the lower surface of the conical tablet array member 8. However, it may also be applied, of course, to such tablet feeders as shown in FIGS. 5 and 6.

[0025] Concretely, in the tablet feeder as shown in FIG.  
25 5, a columnar tablet array member 8 is rotatably

accommodated in a cylindrical tablet accommodating section 4, and a plurality of pockets 11 are defined on the cylindrical surface of the tablet array member 8 so as to extend in a vertical direction. In this tablet feeder, in which the tablets A are arrayed in a line along the vertical direction within the pockets 11, the tablets A can be divided by using the partitioning member 13 without causing flaws or cracks to the tablets A as in the foregoing embodiment, where the partitioning member 13 itself also will never lead to breakage.

[0026] In the tablet feeder as shown in FIG. 6, a columnar tablet array member 8 is rotatably accommodated in a cylindrical tablet accommodating section 4, and has at its top end a tilted surface 8a, where a pocket 11 is provided only at one place, the lowermost place of the tilted surface 8a. Tablets A accommodated in the tablet accommodating section 4 are introduced to the pocket 11 by the tilted surface 8a, and thereafter, upon reaching a discharge position, they are divided by the partitioning member 13 so that the upper tablets A do not fall into the lower pocket 11. This tablet feeder also can produce the same effects as the foregoing embodiments by virtue of the partitioning member 13.

[0027] The pocket 11 does not always retain more than 2 tablets A but may retain only one tablet A.

[0028] Also, the partitioning member 13 used in each of the aforementioned tablet feeders is not limited to the above construction. For example, as shown in FIG. 7, the brush elements 15a, 15b may be formed so that the protrusion dimension becomes reduced in accordance with the distance to the outer cylindrical surface of the tablet array member 8. In the aforementioned embodiment, the partitioning portion 14 is formed so as to protrude from the both sides of the fixing portion 16, though the partitioning portion 14 may be formed so as to protrude from one sides of the fixing portion 16. The construction of the fixing portion 16 itself may be changed in various ways in accordance with the construction of each tablet feeder.

[0029] In the aforementioned embodiments, the brush elements 15a having tip of U-shape are provided at the intermediate portion of the partitioning portion 14 and the brush elements 15b having a linear shape are provided at the both sides of the partitioning portion 14, though all brush may be formed by the brush elements 15a having tip of U-shape.

[0030] In the aforementioned embodiments, each of the brush elements 15a, 15b of the partitioning portion 14 is constituted by single linear member, though the brush element may be constituted by a bundle of filaments, i.e.,

a plurality of filaments 17 which is got together as shown in FIGS. 9A, 9B. Concretely, the brush of the partitioning portion 14 may be formed a plurality of filaments 17 which is got together and has a tip bent in a U-shape. Thus, as  
5 the cross sectional area of each filament becomes reduced, it is possible to further eliminate a problem that the tablet A is damaged and a problem that the brush constituting the partitioning portion 14 is deformed.